COSEWIC Annual Report

presented to

The Minister of the Environment

and

The Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council (CESCC)

from

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)

2014-2015

COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEPAC
Comité sur la situation des espèces en péril au Canada

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ITEM I – COSEWIC ACTIVITIES

1. Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings:

Section 15 (1) of the *Species at Risk Act* states: "The functions of COSEWIC are to (*a*) assess the status of each wildlife species considered by COSEWIC to be at risk and, as part of the assessment, identify existing and potential threats to the species and

(i) classify the species as extinct, extirpated, endangered, threatened or of special concern,

(ii) indicate that COSEWIC does not have sufficient information to classify the species, or

(iii) indicate that the species is not currently at risk".

Under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), the foremost function of COSEWIC is to "assess the status of each wildlife species considered by COSEWIC to be at risk and, as part of the assessment, identify existing and potential threats to the species".

COSEWIC held two Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings in this reporting year (October, 2014 to September, 2015) from November 23 to November 28, 2014 and from April 27 to May 1, 2015. During the current reporting period, COSEWIC assessed the status or reviewed the classification of 56 wildlife species.

The wildlife species assessment results for the 2014-2015 reporting period include the following:

Extinct:	0
Extirpated:	1
Endangered:	21
Threatened:	11
Special Concern:	21
Data Deficient:	1
Not at Risk:	1
Total:	56

Of the 56 wildlife species examined, COSEWIC reviewed the classification of 40 that had been previously assessed. The review of classification for 24 of those wildlife species resulted in a confirmation of the same risk status as the previous assessment (see Table 1a).

Table 1a. Confirmation of status for wildlife species previously assessed:

EXTIRPATED	ENDANGERED	THREATENED	SPECIAL CONCERN
-----	Boreal Felt Lichen (Atlantic population)	Black Redhorse	Ancient Murrelet
	Caribou (Atlantic–Gaspésie population)	Caribou (Boreal population)	Banded Cord–moss
	North Pacific Right Whale	Ermine *haidarum* subspecies	Boreal Felt Lichen (Boreal population)
	Ottoe Skipper	Western Rattlesnake	Columbian Carpet Moss
	Red Mulberry		Frosted Glass–whiskers (Atlantic population)
	Spotted Turtle		Grass Pickerel
	Townsend's Mole		Northern Red–legged Frog
	White Flower Moth		Shortnose Sturgeon
			Spotted Bat
			Spotted Sucker
			Twisted Oak Moss
			Western Skink

Data Deficient and Not at Risk: COSEWIC assessed two wildlife species that were not assigned into risk categories. In November 2014, classification was reviewed for Frosted Glass–whiskers (Pacific population) and status confirmed as Data Deficient. In May 2015, COSEWIC reassessed a wildlife species previously designated as Special Concern (but was not on Schedule 1 of SARA). The Winter Skate (Western Scotian Shelf – Georges Bank population) was assessed as Not at Risk.

With the transmission of this report, COSEWIC provides assessments (see Table 1b) of 30 wildlife species newly classified as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened and of Special Concern to the Minister of Environment to consider whether to recommend to the Governor in Council (GIC) that they be added to Schedule 1 of SARA.

Table 1b. Newly classified wildlife species for consideration of listing on Schedule 1 of SARA:

EXTIRPATED	ENDANGERED	THREATENED	SPECIAL CONCERN
Eastern Box Turtle	Beluga Whale (St. Lawrence Estuary population)	Black–foam Lichen	Caribou (Newfoundland population)
	Black Swift	Blue Ash	Cassin's Auklet
	Broad–banded Forestsnail	Eastern Wolf	Prairie Rattlesnake
	Fascicled Ironweed	Griscom's Arnica	Red–necked Phalarope
	Limber Pine	Sable Island Sweat Bee	Spiked Saxifrage
	Phantom Orchid	Small White Lady's–slipper	Tiny Tassel
	Poweshiek Skipperling	Toothcup (Great Lakes Plains population)	Vivid Dancer
	Proud Globelet		Yellow–banded Bumble Bee
	Tall Beakrush		Yukon Podistera
	Toothcup (Southern Mountain population)		
	Warmouth		
	Winter Skate (Gulf of St. Lawrence population)		
	Winter Skate (Eastern Scotian Shelf – Newfoundland population)		

Detailed results of COSEWIC's status assessment of each wildlife species, including the reasons for each designation, can be found on the COSEWIC website at the following address: http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct0/index_e.cfm?#results.

Status reports containing the information on which COSEWIC's status assessments are based will be available on the SARA Public Registry at the following address: www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

As of May 2015, COSEWIC's assessments include 711 wildlife species in various risk categories, including 316 Endangered, 167 Threatened, 205 Special Concern, and 23 Extirpated (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition, 15 wildlife species have been assessed as Extinct.

As of May 2015, a total of 54 wildlife species have also been designated as Data Deficient and 172 have been assessed and assigned Not at Risk status.

2. Important Notes Regarding Status Assessments:

Section 27 of SARA states that the Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister, by order amend the List in accordance with subsections (1.1) and (1.2) by adding a wildlife species, by reclassifying a listed wildlife species or by removing a listed wildlife species, and the Minister may, by order, amend the List in a similar fashion in accordance with subsection (3).

Spiked Saxifrage (*Micranthes spicata*): COSEWIC assessed the Spiked Saxifrage for the first time in May 2013. Based on that assessment, the Committee recommended in its Annual Report to CESCC (September 2013) that this wildlife species be listed as Threatened under SARA. Subsequently, information was received indicating continued survey effort by Environment Canada had discovered several previously unknown populations of Spiked Saxifrage. According to Section 24 of SARA, COSEWIC must review the classification of a wildlife species, if there is reason to believe its status might have changed. At the November 2013 COSEWIC Wildlife Species assessment meeting, the Vascular Plant Specialist Subcommittee of COSEWIC recommended, and COSEWIC agreed, that a re-examination of the recommendations based on the new information was warranted. In December 2013, the Chair of COSEWIC informed the Minister of Environment of this situation and the possibility for re-assessment. At the Wildlife Species Assessment Meeting held from April 27 to May 1, 2015, COSEWIC produced a report with the new information and reassessed this population as Special Concern.

3. Other Species Assessment Activities:

Emergency Assessments

Section 29 of SARA provides for the listing of a species based on an imminent threat to the survival of the wildlife species under an emergency basis. Section 30 (1) of SARA states that COSEWIC is to prepare a status report on the wildlife species and, within one year after the making of the order, COSEWIC must, in a report in writing to the Minister, (a) confirm the classification of the species; (b) recommend to the Minister that the species be reclassified; or (c) recommend to the Minister that the species be removed from the List.

During the period covered in this report COSEWIC did not receive any requests for Emergency Assessment.

4. Wildlife Species Assessments returned by the Governor in Council (GIC) to COSEWIC for further information or consideration:

Section 27 (1.1) (c) of SARA provides for the Governor in Council to, on the recommendation of the Minister, refer an assessment of the status of a species back to COSEWIC for further information or consideration.

During the period covered in this report no wildlife species were returned by (GIC) by COSEWIC.

5. Wildlife Species Selected for Status Report Preparation:

Section 15.1 (b) of SARA states that one of the functions of COSEWIC is to "determine when wildlife species are to be assessed, with priority given to those more likely to become extinct".

Following COSEWIC's process for prioritizing new wildlife species for assessment (as outlined at: http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct3/index_e.cfm#p1, 17 wildlife species from COSEWIC's Species Specialist Subcommittees' candidate lists (including two bundles of three species) were chosen by the Committee for status report commissioning in 2016.

Please see http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/pdf/Final_Candidate_Species_Rationales_English.pdf for a list of those prioritized candidate species.

6. COSEWIC Subcommittees:

Section 18 (1) of SARA requires COSEWIC to establish subcommittees of specialists to assist in the preparation and review of status reports on wildlife species considered to be at risk, including subcommittees specializing in groups of wildlife species and a subcommittee specializing in aboriginal traditional knowledge.

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee

COSEWIC's Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee is responsible for ensuring that Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) is appropriately accounted for in COSEWIC's assessment process. The Subcommittee consists of members appointed by the Federal Minister of Environment. The Co-chairs of the ATK Subcommittee are members of COSEWIC and provide COSEWIC with their expertise on ATK.

ATK source reports, which compile all potential sources of documented ATK for a given species, were completed for Polar Bear, Wood Turtle, Bowhead Whale, Sea Otter, Eastern Flowering Dogwood, Great Basin Spadefoot Toad and Ross's Gull. These reports were prepared to inform species status assessments.

An ATK Gathering Project was initiated for the Chinook (Okanagan population) and the Subcommittee continues with plans related to an ATK Gathering Project for Narwhal. Most notably, the Subcommittee prepared a communication document that summarizes the role of COSEWIC and the ATK Subcommittee and provides an overview of the gathering project to share with communities.

In addition, the Subcommittee developed an electronic repository for all materials used in the development of ATK Reports so that supporting documents in status reports are available for future use such as for 10-year reassessments, and the Subcommittee finalized an introduction letter from the Subcommittee to known Aboriginal communities and organizations as a means of improving awareness and the sharing of ATK for assessment purposes.

COSEWIC extends its sincere gratitude to the members of the ATK Subcommittee for their ongoing commitment to ensuring COSEWIC assessments are informed by the best possible information.

Species Specialist Subcommittees

COSEWIC's Species Specialists Subcommittees (SSCs) provide taxonomic expertise to the Committee. Each SSC is typically led by two Co-chairs and members are recognized Canadian experts in the taxonomic group in question, able to demonstrate high standards of education, experience, and expertise and have a demonstrated knowledge of wildlife conservation. Members are drawn from universities, provincial wildlife agencies, museums, Conservation Data Centres, and other sources of expertise on Canadian species. SSC members support the Co-chairs in developing candidate lists of species to be considered for assessment, commissioning status reports for priority species, reviewing reports for scientific accuracy and completeness, and proposing to COSEWIC a status for each species. Currently, COSEWIC has 10 SSCs: Amphibians and Reptiles, Arthropods, Birds, Freshwater Fishes, Marine Fishes, Marine Mammals, Molluscs, Mosses and Lichens, Terrestrial Mammals and Vascular Plants.

For more information please see http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct4/index_e.cfm

SSC meetings take place annually in different locations in Canada or by teleconference held once or twice a year. Observers are invited to attend and public information sessions may also take place.

Aside from their continued work to ensure that high quality status reports are brought to each COSEWIC Wildlife Species Assessment Meeting, SSCs also periodically undertake special projects aimed at assisting the work of the SSCs. For example, a project is underway to update the rationale and refine boundaries of the Amphibians and Reptiles Faunal Provinces map, which will assist the SSC in spatially delineating Designatable Units. The Freshwater Fishes SC continued its work on a Designatable Unit structure for Ciscos, which will be used as the basis for future Cisco assessments. The Marine Fishes SC proposed a Designatable Unit structure for two salmon groups (Sockeye Salmon – Fraser River Drainage, and Chinook Salmon in Southern British Columbia) in preparation for their assessment, and the Designatable Unit structure was approved COSEWIC in May 2015. In addition, the Molluscs SC completed a special project "Conservation Prioritization of Ontario and Quebec Terrestrial Molluscs".

COSEWIC is extremely grateful for the important work of the SSC members who provide their time and expertise on a volunteer basis.

7. COSEWIC Operations and Procedures:

Section 19 of SARA states that COSEWIC "may make rules respecting the holding of meetings and the general conduct of its activities."

COSEWIC is guided in its activities by an Operations and Procedures Manual that is reviewed annually by COSEWIC's Operations and Procedures Subcommittee, who recommend any necessary changes to the Committee for their approval. During this reporting period, the COSEWIC Operations and Procedures Manual was updated to reflect some minor changes in COSEWIC's procedures. The most notable changes are as follows:

- Addition of one new member for the Marine Mammals Species Specialist Subcommittee (from 8 to 9 members) to assist with increased workload associated with reassessments for this high profile taxonomic group. The number of members may be subsequently reduced if the workload decreases in the future;
- Approval of a new COSEWIC National Ecological Areas Map;
- Approval of changes to Criterion D2 to increase its rigour, as used in COSEWIC's assessment Process;
- Changes to the Instructions for the preparation of COSEWIC Status Reports, including the separation of threats and limiting factors and better guidance on how to deal with these aspects of a status report;
- Inclusion of the Threats Calculator in the Instructions for the preparation of COSEWIC Status Reports and new Appendix on conducting and incorporating a Threats Classification and Assessment Calculator into a status report.

8. Procedural Working Groups:

Section 18 (1) of SARA also allows COSEWIC to establish subcommittees to advise it or to exercise or perform any of its functions.

Procedural working groups are essential to ensuring COSEWICs operations and procedures are efficient, effective and clearly followed, thus maintaining the quality and consistency of COSEWIC status assessments and processes.

a) Press Release Working Group

This Working Group was active before and during each Wildlife Species Assessment Meeting on the production of each press release.

b) Criteria Working Group

This Working Group provided ongoing reviews and updates of COSEWIC criteria and their application based on changes to IUCN criteria.

c) New Species Priority Setting Working Group

This Working Group continued its work on implementing a more consistent and stringent process for prioritizing new species for assessment by COSEWIC.

d) Species Bundling Working Group

This Working Group continued its work on overseeing an Ecosystem Level Threat analysis report for species in the South Okanagan, British Columbia, which will be used to inform COSEWIC's decisions on how best to bundle wildlife species with common threats for assessment.

e) Interpreting "Wild by Nature" Working Group

This Working Group continued its work in providing a COSEWIC definition (i.e. interpretation) of "Wild by Nature" which occurs in the definition of "Wildlife Species".

f) Terrestrial Ecozones Working Group

This Working Group presented a new COSEWIC Terrestrial Ecozones Map to COSEWIC and it was adopted for use by the Committee.

9. COSEWIC Communications:

Insofar as resources allow, COSEWIC and its Chairs over the years have made every effort to inform managers and the public on the work of the Committee.

During the current reporting period, COSEWIC released two press releases outlining the results of the Fall 2014 and the Spring 2015 Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings. These releases can be found on the COSEWIC website at www.cosewic.gc.ca.

A package addressed to COSEWIC was received containing several letters from students in the Grade 6 class at MacLeod Public School in Sudbury, Ontario. Each student had been assigned three wildlife species assessed by COSEWIC to research. The letters contained comments such as "when I went to your website I thought that this is helpful and really easy to understand; the website is really amazing and so organized; thank you for doing what you do; we need someone to keep track of this and you are doing a fantastic job; please keep educating and spreading the message about these endangered animals; I think COSEWIC is important for keeping Canada full of biodiversity; thank you for educating us."

In addition, the Chair of COSEWIC, Dr. Eric B. (Rick) Taylor attended the following meetings /gave presentations on the work of COSEWIC etc.:

- Participated in a teleconference organized by Justina Ray, Co-chair of the COSEWIC Terrestrial Mammals SC (re Barren Ground Caribou) where concerns by the Nunavut jurisdiction were well addressed and had to do mainly with not fully understanding the COSEWIC process.
- Gave a webinar on COSEWIC to University of Toronto
- Gave a webinar on COSEWIC to Canadian Section of the Wildlife Society
- Wrote an article on COSEWIC and SARA which was published in *Decision Point* a newsletter of The Environmental Decisions Group (http://www.edg.org.au/) a consortium of Australian universities and research groups while in Australia.
- Sent a letter to all First Nation groups in British Columbia providing information about COSEWIC, its Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) Subcommittee to inform them about the work of COSEWIC, the ATK Subcommittee and the upcoming salmon assessments.

ITEM II – COSEWIC MEMBERSHIP

Section 16 of SARA states that (1) COSEWIC is to be composed of members appointed by the Minister after consultation with the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council and with any experts and expert bodies, such as the Royal Society of Canada, that the Minister considers to have relevant expertise. (2) Each member must have expertise drawn from a discipline such as conservation biology, population dynamics, taxonomy, systematics or genetics or from community knowledge or aboriginal traditional knowledge of the conservation of wildlife species. (3) The members are to be appointed to hold office for renewable terms of not more than four years.

1. Membership Changes:

For a current list of members on COSEWIC, please see the COSEWIC website.
http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct6/sct6_4_e.cfm

Members from the Federal, Provincial or Territorial jurisdictions are recommended to the Federal Minister of the Environment by the jurisdiction.

The Co-chairs of the ATK Subcommittee, as are all ATK Subcommittee members, are nominated by National Aboriginal Organizations with the exception of two of its members to be nominated by the ATK Subcommittee. Subcommittee members are appointed by the Minister of the Environment. Co-chairs are elected by the ATK Subcommittee membership and recommended to the Minister for appointment to that position.

Species Specialist Subcommittee Co-chairs and Non-government Science Members are recommended to the Minister of the Environment by COSEWIC following an in-depth review process.

A call for four Species Specialist Subcommittee Co-chairs and one Non-government Science member was posted on the COSEWIC website between January 21 and February 18, 2015. Once the call was closed, Selection Committees comprised of both COSEWIC members and Species Specialist Subcommittee members evaluated the applications following procedures for member selection set out in COSEWIC's Operations & Procedures Manual. The Chairs of each Selection Committee prepared reports summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of the applicants, which were discussed at the Spring 2015 Wildlife Species Assessment meeting. Candidates were ranked by COSEWIC members and their names and CVs were provided to the Federal Minister of the Environment and CESCC in May 2015 for consideration of appointment. The individual who was appointed as Co-chair of the Marine Fishes Specialist Subcommittee resigned and a further Call for Membership for that position was posted from June 3 to July 2, 2015. A Selection Committee has evaluated the applications and prepared a selection report for COSEWIC's use during the fall of 2015.

ITEM III – WILDLIFE SPECIES ASSESSMENTS

In accordance with Section 25(1) of SARA when COSEWIC completes an assessment of the status of a wildlife species, it must provide the Minister and the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council with a copy of the assessment and the reasons for it. A copy of the assessment must also be included on the public registry.

Wildlife Species assessed since the last annual report, including status assigned, reasons for designation (including uncertainties if applicable) and COSEWIC criteria with alphanumeric codes can be found on the COSEWIC website at the following address: http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct0/index_e.cfm?#results.

The status reports will be available in English and French on the Public Registry at the following address: http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/

ITEM IV – WILDIFE SPECIES ASSESSED BY COSEWIC SINCE ITS INCEPTION

In accordance with Section 25(2) of SARA, COSEWIC must annually prepare a complete list of every wildlife species it has assessed since the coming into force of that section and a copy of that list must be included in the public registry.

The Canadian Species at Risk publication is available on the COSEWIC website.

http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct0/index_e.cfm#sar

It includes all wildlife species assessed by COSEWIC since its inception up to and including October, 2014.